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RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3423
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SUBJECT: Syria/Israel, Syria/Rome, Asad CBS Interview, Algeria,
Lebanon, Iraq (9/7-9)

¶1. Summary: The main story in Syrian papers over the weekend was the Israeli warplanes violation of Syrian airspace on September 6. Government-owned Al-Thawra, the only paper to appear on September 7, quoted a Syrian military spokesman as saying that Syrian air defenses opened fire on the Israeli planes and forced them to leave after dropping some of their ammunition without causing human losses or material damage. The report said that Syria warned the Israeli government confirming that Syria reserves the right to correspond to this action in the appropriate way. The paper also cited Arab and foreign condemnations of the "uncalculated Israeli adventure," noting that Russia condemned the Israeli "hostile act" and expressed its deep concern over such "unacceptable" actions. Iran expressed concern in a telephone conversation the Iranian foreign minister held with his Syrian counterpart, condemning the Israeli act and stressing full support for and solidarity with Syria. Arab League Secretary General Amre Mousa urged the Quartet Committee and the

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international community to deal seriously with this Israeli action and the negative repercussions that might result from it. Papers also featured condemnation statements made by spokespersons of foreign ministries of Egypt, Qatar, Paris and Turkey. Chief Editor of government-Tisheen on September 8 criticized Washington's silence on this describing it as "the silence of tombs" on this action, which is interpreted as a US support for the Israeli act.

On Syrian-Italian relations, papers reported VP Shara's visit to Italy and his meetings with Italian Premier Romano Prodi, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alima, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee at the Italian Senate Senator Lamberto Dini and with Life Senator Julio Andreotti. In a press conference following their meeting, Prodi said that their talks focused on developments in the Middle East. On Lebanon, Prodi, expressed appreciation of Lebanese Parliament Speaker, Nabih Berri's initiative regarding the election of the forthcoming President of Lebanon, and said that the next Lebanese president must satisfy all spectrums of the Lebanese society. Prodi expressed anxiety over Israeli warplanes' violation of Syrian airspace and warned that such acts might lead to an explosion in the region. Shara praised Italy's role in contributing positively to finding solutions to problems of the region, adding that the Israeli provocation against Syria was not on the agenda of the talks, and constitutes a threat

to efforts being exerted to find solutions to problems in the region. He expressed hope that the European Union will condemn such a provocation so that it will not be repeated.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad in a comprehensive interview with American CBS channel: Americans do not want to acknowledge their error and look for a scapegoat...

Things worsen and US forces will not achieve stability... The American administration does not support any political process in Iraq... Chaos is contagious and Syria has no interest in it... We fought extremism when American leaders called it jihad... Hizbollah is part of the Lebanese society and Israel daily trespasses Lebanon... We are working for peace and reject the existence of WMD in the region" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 9/9)

"A reckless Israeli adventure. A Syria military spokesman: We warn the government and retain our right to correspond. Russia denounces and expresses deep worry. Iran: We are fully steadfast with Syria. Turkey: A provocative action. Shara: Israel endeavors to aggravate tension and block possibilities of peace. Confused answers from Israel. Washington refrains from any comment" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 9/7)

"Strong condemnations of the reckless Israeli infiltration continue. The Arab League calls on the international community to deal seriously with the breach. Cairo: increases tension. Doha: We are steadfast with Syria. Paris: We are committed to peace. Ankara: We are worried about this act" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/8)

"Shara returns from Rome after holding talks on developments in the region: The Israeli aggression cannot be tolerated"

(Government-owned Tishreen, 9/8)

"Terrorism strikes again in Algeria. 88 killed and injured in a suicide bomb explosion in a military barrack. Syria condemns the terrorist attacks and calls for full support of Algerian brothers" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 9/9)

"General Petraeus, Commander of US forces in Iraq, might recommend reduction of US forces. More than 18 US soldiers were killed in the first week of September" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/8)

"A global BBC opinion poll: 67 % of people around the world support a US pullout from Iraq" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/8)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Israeli Aggression and the Silence of Tombs"

Isam Dari, chief editor of government-owned Tishreen, wrote (9/5): "Why did Washington refuse to comment on this Israeli aggression? Was it because it was waiting to receive the comment from its source, Israel, or was that in compliance with the Israeli decision not to respond to the "Syrian accusations?"

"But we will not blame the American master as long as he lacks a free and independent policy toward anything related to the region, and as long as the American policies on the Middle East are cooked in the kitchens of Tel Aviv before they are marketed by the neo-Zionists who control the American decision-making centers.

"We are not awaiting an American response, because if it comes it will justify this piracy. Perhaps the new hostile act was coordinated between Washington and Tel Aviv. We no longer know how to separate the American and Israeli policies.

"With this Israeli belligerence, the leaders of Tel Aviv prove that they are really first-class peace advocates and that they are

working to remove the tension and defuse the volatile situation!

"What is more important is that the American silence, which can only be explained as an exposed and blatant encouragement for Israel, proves that the American peaceful intentions are sincere! It is a message of peace for the peoples of the region, intended to prove that the American endeavors to bring about the hoped-for peace are honest. And it is the prelude to the conference that George Bush, the eternal peace lover, called for....

"How can the Bush administration host a peace meeting when it blesses Israel's terrorism and piracy...?
Don't we have the right to ask about the motives of the new Israeli aggression on the one hand and the suspicious American silence on the other at this particular time when the US Administration is promoting a 'peace meeting'?

"Is there a connection between the Israeli violation of the Syrian airspace and the adoption by the Arab foreign ministers of a resolution stressing the need to invite Syria and Lebanon to the Washington meeting, if the aim of the meeting is indeed to revive the peace process?

"Did Israel want, at the instructions of the US Administration, or the US Administration want, upon a proposal from Israel, to justify the failure not to invite Syria to the American-Israeli 'normalization meeting', which will see broad and significant Arab participation?

"Despite everything, we are not surprised by the American position or by the Israeli belligerence. This is the nature of the US Administration and the truth of terrorist Israel...."

"Beautifying the Ugly"

Mundhir Khalil Id, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (9/7): "President Bush twisted facts and underestimated the intelligence of others when he spoke from Sidney about security progress in Iraq....

"The US President is perhaps trying to suggest that he prevailed in Iraq and that a partial withdrawal has now become possible. But the fact is that US occupation is no longer able to stay in Iraq.... Regardless of the objectives of Bush's statements, the only fact that remains is that the solution lies in setting a timetable for withdrawal and leaving the affairs of the country to its people, who saw nothing under the occupation other than tragedies and destruction....

"Until then, the Iraq nightmare will continue to haunt Bush wherever he goes, whether in Sidney, which turned into a military base because of his visit and the strong opposition to him, or later in Washington, where the season of reports awaits him."

Corbin